SYNOPSIS

The inaugural award of the international Man-Booker Prize for literature in 2005 marked an important milestone in the global recognition of the Albanian writer Ismail Kadare. In awarding the prize, the panel judge, Professor John Carey hailed Kadare as a guardian of Albanian identify and culture. Kadare certainly brings a powerful sense of ethnic identity to his writing, introducing for the first time on the international stage the customs of his native land. However, he does not dwell on local colour for its own sake and the bardic quality of his work must be read in its contemporary context. Kadare is also the last great chronicler of life under Stalinism. His novels while determined by the history of the dictatorship, transcend the immediate history of their genesis to communicate to a wider audience.

The aim of the thesis is to bring Kadare's works to a wider audience by explaining how he lived and wrote in the Albanian Stalinist environment, and by charting his development as the voice of an Albania suppressed in the course of socialist modernization. One of the criticisms about Kadare is that he wrote to accommodate the mercurial policy changes of the regime. The present study aims to show that this was not the case. Kadare's writing over the forty-five years of dictatorship was extraordinarily coherent in terms of its themes and its focus on aspects of Albanian life. Emphasis is laid on tracing the thematic development of Kadare's works over the period of the dictatorship, with the

intention of justifying his claim to have told the truth to power consistently over the decades of his writing life. The focus is on the period from 1959 until 1985, the years of power of Kadare's nemesis, the dictator Enver Hoxha. This focus on the writer and the dictatorship has determined the choice of works for study.

Ismail Kadare experienced a life of controversy. In his own country and internationally he has been both acclaimed as a writer and condemned as a lackey of the Albanian dictatorship. But it would be a mistake to represent Kadare as a silenced figure under the dictatorship. In a land where writers were routinely harassed, imprisoned, tortured and killed, Kadare produced some of the most brilliant and subversive works to emerge from socialist Eastern Europe. Like every other aspect of his life in Albania his works were subjected to control from above. Kadare also suffered tremendously from the strain, the threats, and the terror arising from the dictator's unpredictable moves. Hoxha retained a level of respect for France and he was wily enough to protect Kadare as a valuable figure to display is the international arena. However, Kadare did not give his imprimatur to the regime in this role of ambassador. On the contrary, he used whatever opportunities arose to disseminate the literary works which spoke so eloquently of his country's plight.

Kadare is the only Albanian writer known widely outside his country. He was committed to Albanian language, culture and national identity, he believed in European humanist ideals and was attracted, to begin with, by the communist

model of modernization in his socially and economically backward land. At the same time he built an influential base in France, his chosen intellectual home in the West. Deeply aware of the need of Albanians to participate in European modernity, he nevertheless came to object profoundly to the ideal of the Albanian 'new man' propagated by the regime, and his works represent powerfully the positive force of ethnic identification.

Kadare voiced his opposition through literature, not doctrine or ideology. He expressed defiance through his representation of the grimness of everyday life under socialism and through his powerful evocations of an Albania more ancient and more durable than the new Albania of Enver Hoxha. He steadfastly refused to surrender his language and identity or to be forced into exile. As a writer working in this Stalinist environment, Kadare represents the endpoint of a history of twentieth- century European socialist literature.

Kadare emerged from a childhood of occupation, war, and anarchy, and experienced the early years of the post-war order as a freeing up of opportunities for self-development and even self-fulfillment. He came of age in the environment of post-war hope for national self-determination and socio-economic progress, and his early works were born of and operate in the new world order of the 1950s. They concern themselves with youth culture, social and cultural modernization, not with the ritual functions of socialist realism, identified in the popular imagination with the message 'to break free'. They

influenced young people throughout Europe, even in the Soviet Union and post war communist Albania. With its focus on the uniqueness of individual existence and relegation of social considerations, existentialism proved powerful in encouraging the post-war generations of Europe to disengage from the problems and history of their parents' generation, and to focus on self-realization and the future. The modernization of the socialist regime was achieved at the cost of extensive limitations on personal freedom. This was not the modernity which lay at the heart of existentialism, and it was not long before the young Kadare began to stand out.

The works of the first half of the 1960s are dominated by the young writer's commitment to his homeland after the break with the Soviet Union and an increasing awareness of the problems of the dictatorship: generational conflict and friction between traditional and modern life styles, problems of corruption and nepotism in the regime, sterility in cultural and social matters. Albania figures in these works as a backdrop to questions of socialist modernization, but by 1964 a change is perceptible in the representations of Albania. Ethnic identity had became a powerful sustaining force for the writer. At the same time, in the context of regime's move towards an openly nationalistic socialism, Kadare began to experience the conflict between the regime's politicized nationalism and his own deeply felt patriotism. Over the

years this conflict would become a more or less open battle for the voice of Albania.

This thesis entitled *Politics of Freedom: An Analysis of Ismail Kadare's Selected Works* attempts to portray Kadare's journey from a young man enjoying the first fruits of communist modernization to the wily, defiant and self-doubting writer at the end of the dictatorship. This literary analysis attempts to reveal Kadare's work as representing a single-minded and coherent defiance of the dictatorship from *The City without Signs* in 1959 to *The Shadow* at the end of the 1980s. This thesis consists of five chapters and a selected bibliography.

Chapter one is designed to supply the necessary information concerning the political, social and literary background of Ismail Kadare which prompt him to write for ethnic and political freedom. The Albanian experience differed in important ways from that of the other Eastern European socialist dictatorships. Official Albanian scribes and artists presented the history of communist Albania as the saga of a backward, besieged people marching towards a statistics utopia. The actual story of communist Albania is however quintessentially dystopian, a black inventory of blood purges and repression, a case study in betrayal and obsessive xenophobia, a cacophony of bitter polemics with real and fantasized enemies that the outside world barely took time to notice. Several years of party infighting and extermination campaigns against the country's antic communist

opposition, the communist leaders Enver Hoxha and Mehmet Shehu emerged as the dominant figures in Albania. They dominated Albania and denied the Albanian people the most basic human and civil rights by presenting themselves, as well as the communist party and state security apparatus they controlled as the vigilant defenders of the country's independence. Kadare's works were published in this communist environment in various forms and formats: different works were drafted as short stories, censored, revised, confiscated, reworked and passed through the filters of comment, feed back and revision and were both translate and published inside and outside Albania.

Kadare's attitude to the communist regime as a young writer is the main focus of the second chapter. His works, *The City without Signs*, *The General of the Dead Army, The Monster* and *The Wedding* are at the centre of this analysis. In the works discussed in this chapter the foundations of Kadare's writing life were laid. *The City without Signs* read as the reflection of post-war youth, liberation from traditional roles, and the blights of careerism, corruption and the weakness of the Party to ideological manipulation. In *The General of the Dead Army* Kadare recognized the co-existence of two Albania, the modernizing communist present and the traumatized, silenced past and suggests the necessity the nation to move beyond the culture of death. *The Monster* uses the language of European surrealism to explore the effects of the isolation of Albania, coming to the classic Central European recognition of the inseperability of politics and

the private sphere, as the vocabularies of fear and the foreign merge in the imagination of contemporary Albanians. In *The Wedding*, Kadare offers his most propitiatory contribution to the debate about modernity versus tradition.

Kadare's political responsibility in the period of communist regime is anatomized in the third chapter through four works. The works are *Chronicle in Stone, Winter of Great Solitude, Twilight of the Steppe-Gods* and *The Three Arched Bridge*. The revision of his origins and his identity as a writer laid the basis for the works of his mature period, in which he grapples with the fundamental questions of his existence: the possibility of survival as a writer in the environment of communist modernization: the battle for the existence of the other, 'eternal' Albania which comes to exist in a parallel world to the communist present: and the search for the origins of the present in the historical novels dealing with the end of the Byzantine era, the arrival of the Ottomans and the chaotic beginnings of Albanian modernity.

Kadare's political vision at the end of the regime is the main focus of the fourth chapter. Along with *The Palace of Dreams*, *The Shadow* forms the central part of this chapter. Kadare refers to *The Palace of Dreams* as the novel which launched the most ferocious attack on the dictatorship. In recognizing ethnicity to be both a deeply embedded and politically instrumentalized aspect of Albanian identity, *The Palace of Dreams* is as much an assault on Hoxha's state nationalism as it is a satire on totalitarian aspirations to complete control,

or a veiled attack on Ottoman, Soviet or Serb imperialism. The critique of the inauthenticity of life under the regime, rather than of the regime itself, is the key to *The Shadow*. The fifth chapter is the conclusion and it sums up the major arguments that remain of the thesis. It is time for the world to listen to Kadare and to see Albania through the mirror of his work as a modern nation poised to re-enter European life.